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RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY 2303
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ JAN 0352
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA PRIORITY 1319
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID PRIORITY 1533
RUEHMU/AMEMBASSY MANAGUA PRIORITY 0474
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SUBJECT: CORREA INAUGURATION: USDEL CONVEYS MESSAGE OF
FRIENDSHIP

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The U.S. delegation to the inauguration of Ecuadorian president Rafael Correa headed by Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutierrez effectively conveyed a message of

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friendship and respect between the U.S. and Ecuador. That message was warmly received both publicly and privately here, but top billing went to Hugo Chavez and Evo Morales, who joined Correa for several public events. Other world leaders, including Iranian President Ahmadinejad, kept lower profiles. End Summary.

Sec. Gutierrez Meets with Business and Political Leaders

¶2. (SBU) Between official inauguration events, Secretary Gutierrez met privately with Foreign Minister Maria Fernanda Espinosa, Peruvian President Alan Garcia, Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega, Argentinean Vice President Daniel Scioli, and Uruguayan Vice President Rodolfo Nin Novoa (SepTels). He also conducted two roundtables for leading U.S. and Ecuadorian business leaders including leaders of IBM, Pfizer, General Motors and Citibank, as well as the heads of all major Ecuadorian business chambers. Business leaders expressed their thanks for USG efforts to extend ATPA trade preferences and asked if the extension could be lengthened. Sec. Gutierrez responded that he understood the importance of ATPA for Ecuador and the region and the administration would continue to work with Congress on the issue. Some business leaders were deeply concerned that Correa would impose radical changes and called for U.S. assistance. Sec. Gutierrez said that the U.S. wants good relations with the new administration, that the tone of the dialogue is important, and that the business leaders, as Ecuadorians, would be best placed to influence Correa.

Inauguration Atmosphere Rowdy

13. (SBU) Correa supporters were jubilant at inauguration events. They chanted, waved flags, blew indigenous horns and beat drums in the Congress gallery as Correa outlined his plans for a constituent assembly during his inaugural address (his specific policy agenda is outlined septel). Correa, who sported a tieless embroidered shirt for some of the inaugural events, was greeted everywhere by cheering crowds; there were no reports of anti-Correa demonstrations or sentiment. Headlines and images on January 14 were dominated by Chavez, Morales and Correa, who attended an indigenous ceremony to bless the new president in the highlands town of Zumbahua, where Correa had served as a young man in the local Salesian mission. January 15 images were more statesmanlike, showing a beaming Correa at the podium in the newly-renovated Congress building wearing the presidential sash and waving to supporters.

14. (SBU) The inaugural party in historic San Francisco Convent was packed beyond capacity; rumors of counterfeit and recycled invitations circulated. Worried security plowed through the crowds, upsetting drinks and tripping over lights and cords. Earlier in the day, Ecuadorian security accidentally fired teargas in front of Congress and a bystander was wounded by another accidental discharge in a nearby park.

World Leaders Assume Low Profiles

15. (U) Twelve heads of state attended Correa's swearing-in: Philip, Prince of Asturias, Evo Morales (Bolivia), Luis Inacio Lula da Silva (Brazil), Michelle Bachelet (Chile), Alvaro Uribe (Colombia), Rene Preval (Haiti), Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (Iran), Daniel Ortega (Nicaragua), Oscar Nicanor Duarte (Paraguay), Alan Garcia (Peru), Hugo Chavez

(Venezuela) and Mohamed Abdelaziz (Polisario Front).

16. (U) Evo Morales and Hugo Chavez not only attended the indigenous event in Zumbahua, which other world leaders skipped, but were the only heads of state to attend the ceremony swearing in Correa's cabinet. Although prominently present, Chavez and Morales did not dominate the press with speeches or antics. Chavez was warmly received at public events but limited his interaction with the crowds and did not try to upstage Correa by creating his own parallel events.

17. (U) Confirming his attendance at the last minute and arriving the morning of the swearing-in ceremony, Alvaro Uribe fell victim to a couple of Ecuadorian protocol gaffes. First, Ecuadorian security at the Congress building attempted to close the doors on him, since he arrived after Correa did. Uribe's security blocked the doors open and literally shoved him into the chamber. President of Congress, Jorge Cevallos, initially missed including Uribe when he opened the session by naming heads of state in attendance. Cevallos later corrected his omission and Uribe received a warm round of applause from the audience. Press reported that Uribe was jeered by some crowds.

18. (U) Da Silva, Bachelet, and Garcia came for only one day of the inauguration and made brief statements to the press. Bachelet received the warmest reception at public events, reflecting Ecuadorian goodwill towards her and admiration for Chile. Ahmadinejad kept a relatively low profile, made some statements critical of the U.S. in a CNN interview, and did not appear jointly with Correa during his visit. Prince Philip of Spain stole the show among world leaders. His politics-free, movie star good looks guaranteed swarming crowds pressing to get photos and shake his hand. He prominently attended a mass for families of Ecuadorian victims of the recent ETA bombing in Spain, which garnered even more sympathetic press and the public appreciation of President Correa.

Media Reaction to USDel Positive

¶9. (U) After noting the overwhelming coverage garnered by Chavez and Morales, Secretary Gutierrez decided to reverse his earlier decision to refrain from engaging the media (beyond his arrival statement) and conducted a series of short interviews expressing the USG's message of continued friendship and cooperation on a wide range of issues with the GOE. When asked about trade issues, Secretary Gutierrez highlighted the USG's desire to foster growth and strengthen ties through expanded trade and other programs, while respecting President Correa's decision that a free trade agreement is not opportune at this time. He stressed that much more tied the two countries together than just trade issues. When asked about President Correa's perceived closeness to Hugo Chavez, Secretary Gutierrez responded that he was focusing on U.S.) Ecuador relations and that as a sovereign nation Ecuador was free to have relations with any country it wishes.

¶10. (U) Secretary Gutierrez gave interviews to the two largest newspapers in Ecuador, "El Universo" and "El Comercio." He also gave interviews to a national radio station, Radio Quito, and three major television stations, Ecuavisa, Teleamazonas, and TC Television. Secretary Gutierrez gave statements and answered questions outside of two bilateral meetings and delivered a widely covered arrival statement.

¶11. (U) Media reaction was generally positive to the USDel. El Universo, ran a headline on January 16 reading "Carlos Gutierrez: There Are Themes That Unite Us" and quoted

Secretary Gutierrez on January 15 saying "our countries are

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friends" and "we hope for mutual benefit". El Comercio ran the same quotes on January 15 and headlined January 16 with "U.S. Shows Itself Conciliatory and Cautious With the New Government." TV and radio coverage of the Secretary's statements was extensive and similarly positive.

Comment

¶12. (U) Secretary Gutierrez and his team did a masterful job through both public and private diplomacy of conveying USG openness and friendship with Ecuador and its people.

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